Becky Chamberlin—Overcoming gender bias in science

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Overcoming gender bias in science

"Even if she is a girl..." Words like that might deter a female from loving math and science, especially when the disclaimer is announced to a large audience by a math teacher presenting a major award.

Fortunately, Los Alamos chemist Becky Chamberlin didn’t let gender bias stop her from studying science, achieving an Ivy League doctorate in chemistry.

Success in science means much more than "left brain" logic

In school, Chamberlin was attracted to chemistry because it was quantitative and logical—a chance to combining abstract reasoning with hands-on observations. For a young

woman interested in science and math, she says it's easy to get the impression that "left brain" logical and analytical skills are all that matters.

She advises future scientists to develop other strengths, too—to remember that to get projects funded and publicized, one must be able to write and speak well. And to succeed in project work, one must also be able to organize, mentor, and lead a team.

Many of Becky's female colleagues echo these same themes. Fortunately for the Lab—and for science and humanity—they didn't stop believing in themselves, embracing the character, courage and commitment that the Women's History Month worldwide celebrates.

Addressing nuclear danger concerns through science

A nuclear forensics chemist and nonproliferation expert, Chamberlin is helping our technical experts bring forward a more comprehensive effort on the science of detecting nuclear weapons development.

Addressing the concerns of a recently published report warning that the nuclear danger is more complex than ever, and that current methods are inadequate to address the threats, Chamberlin's goal is to help the Lab answer this challenging question is: how can we accurately tell when a nation or group is moving forward from acquiring nuclear material to using it in weapons?

And she also hopes to encourage Lab colleagues to address such technical objectives efficiently, cutting costs and waste.

"We can't be satisfied by just 'keeping the trains running on time' and operating in compliance with regulations," Chamberlin says. "The charge for us all to look beyond our own narrow job functions to see how we can make the Lab a more productive and creative place than it is today."

Helping the next generation achieve their goals

Chamberlin is dedicated to helping the next generation achieve their goals. Chair of the Los Alamos Employees' Scholarship Fund, she recently helped launch a new fund targeted at non-traditional students who want to pursue a two-year degree. So far, 800 New Mexican students have been awarded millions in scholarships through the employees' combined funds.